

PS: Happy Bir

Story by Dan Andree

HORNS are sounding and whistles blowing as PS, The Preventive Maintenance Monthly magazine, celebrates its 50th birthday this month.

PS is that compact, pocket-sized, cartoon-filled magazine published by the Department of the Army. Its role as a technical bulletin in the Army publications system is to amplify and interpret official maintenance and supply publications, and to motivate soldiers to increase the effectiveness of organizational maintenance and supply operations.

It fulfilled that role for your grandfathers on barren hills in Korean snow; for your fathers in steaming jungles during Vietnamese monsoons; for your sisters in sun-baked Kuwait; and now for you as you patrol the streets in a cold Bosnian rain. In each scenario, they knew, and you know, your equipment will work because of

the preventive maintenance you did with the help of PS magazine.

How did it all get started?

In June 1951 Army Field Forces (now U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command) decided that it needed a way to quickly move maintenance information to soldiers and deliver it in an easily understood format. The command had been impressed with the results of Army Motors, an Ordnance Corps monthly magazine that spread the preventive maintenance doctrine during World War II, and asked the Department of the Army to publish a similar magazine: PS.

It was called PS because the information in it is an informal supplement to existing technical publications, taking up where they leave off. It spells out safety precautions, makes corrections and changes, and explains new procedures. It's a "postscript" to other Army official publications. But it's a postscript with a strong preventive maintenance punch.

Here's how PS works. Its writers find what preventive maintenance information is most urgently needed by field units actually using the equipment. Then they set about providing that information. PS staffers use several sources to determine what PM information to disseminate. These include:

- Information gathered by staff writers on visits to troop units.
- Letters, telephone calls and e-mails received from soldiers all over the world.
- Requests, updates and feedback from all equipment commands.
- Reports, correspondence, news-

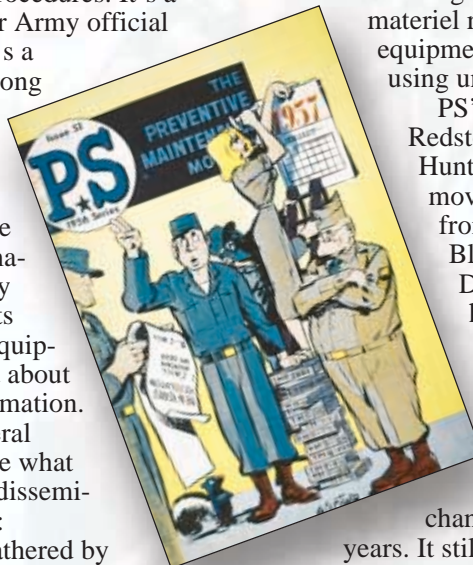
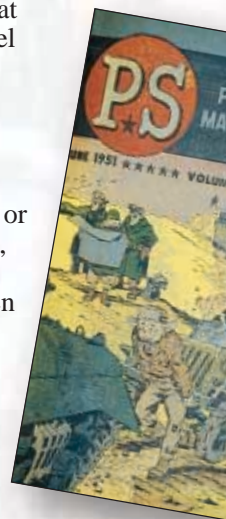
letters and other studies that address organizational level problems.

When it appears that a maintenance or supply problem is widespread or highly detrimental to the communications, mobility or firepower of military units, the PS staff prepares an article on that subject. Then — after much editing, rewriting, many reviews and final approval from the equipment command that manages the gear being written about — the article is published.

More than 100,000 copies of PS go to field units each month. Once there, unit commanders decide how much authority to give it. It is their tool for enhancing the combat and materiel readiness of equipment in the hands of using units.

PS's current home is Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Ala. It moved there in 1993 from the Lexington-Blue Grass Army Depot, Ky. Previous homes were Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Md.; Raritan Arsenal, N.J.; and Fort Knox, Ky.

PS has changed little over the years. It still tries to catch the soldier's attention with a mixture of vivid graphics and color, gags, "talking" equipment and informal prose. It still aims to communicate its message as clearly and concisely as possible with both pictures and words. And it still uses fictional characters to help present that message.



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MSG Half-Mast and Connie Rodd are two characters that have appeared in every issue. Both were created by Will Eisner, a corporal in World War II and a comic book artist known for his creation, "The Spirit." He first drew Connie and Half-Mast (then only a sergeant) for Army Motors. When the Army decided to start PS in 1951, Eisner was asked to do the creative art. He and his staff set the visual style for the magazine for the next 20 years.

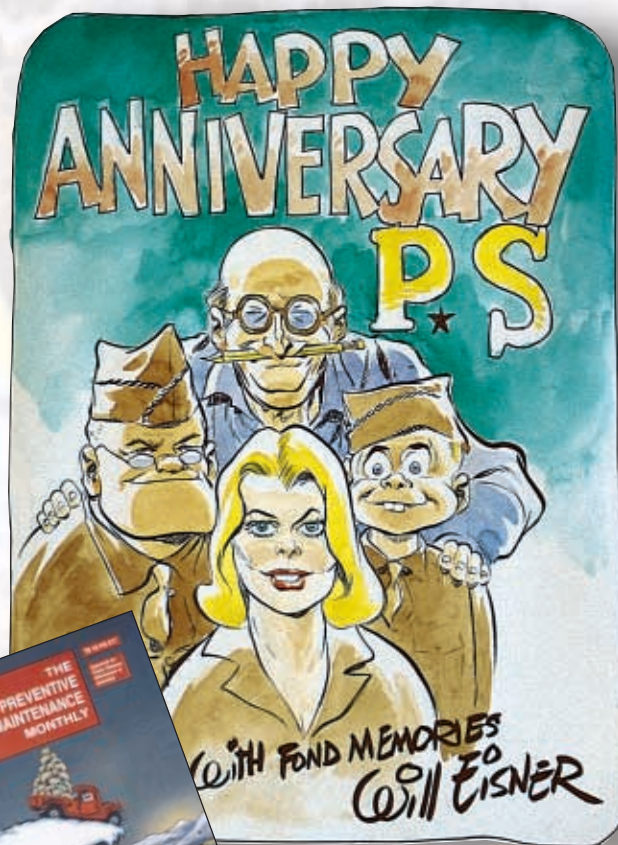
For 10 years after that Murphy Anderson, one of Eisner's assistants and a well-respected comic book artist in his own right, did the PS art. Then Backes Graphic Productions in Princeton, N.J., did the artwork for 12 years, ending this January. Now the art task lies in the skillful and renowned hands of Joe Kubert.

Kubert has 60 years' experience as a commercial artist and has drawn most major comic book characters, including Superman and Batman. He is strongly identified with the line of war

comics "SGT Rock," "Our Army At War," "Enemy Ace" and "Our Fighting Forces." He works out of the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art in Dover, N.J.

Changes in the PS characters over the last 50 years mirror changes in the military and society.

Connie started her career as a pinup-styled siren who was often featured in provocative poses and scanty costumes, and who often spoke lines of thinly veiled double-entendres. Like Betty Boop and aircraft nose art, this was considered an acceptable portrayal of a female to the all-male readership the editors tried to attract. That kind of enticement stopped in the early 1970s as more women became part of the Army.



PS in 1955 and Joe Dope left in 1957.

Bonnie, a black woman, was added to the cartoon "staff" in 1970. Since then, Bonnie and Connie have grown into their roles as professional civilian advisers to the Army's maintenance workforce.

A few other characters have come and gone, including SGTs Bull Dozer, Windy Windsock and Macon Sparks. And there may be a new character or two on the horizon.

The style of PS writing can be credited to two men, James Kidd and Donald Hubbard. Kidd became editor after PS's first two years, and held the job for 30 years. Hubbard spent 32 years at PS, more than 20 of them as managing editor, before taking over the helm.

PS is now on the Internet at www.logsa.army.mil/psmag/pshome.html. Readers may click on MSG Half-Mast and go to the latest online edition or select other characters to reach the PS index, request back issues or communicate with the magazine's staff.

So, as you hold your June copy of PS, Issue 582, or view it on the web, remember the long-time PS motto: "We Have the World's Best Equipment — Take Care of It!" □

